

THE

Wide-Awake Gift:

A

KNOW-NOTHING TOKEN

FOR

1855.

EDITED BY "ONE OF 'EM."

"Put None but Americans on Guard to-night."



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"THE KNOW NOTHINGS."

BY DR. THOMAS E. BOND.

It will be readily admitted that all secret associations are liable to be abused to bad purposes, and especially political organizations, whose proceedings are secret, because they are not restrained by the wholesome check of public opinion ; and hence the individual members are not so essentially controlled, by regard to their reputation, as they would be if what they proposed to do was subjected to public animadversion. "Know Nothingism" may, therefore, be an evil, or it may become one of great magnitude by the abuse of power ; but, on the other hand, it may, if directed by right motives, effect great good, and counteract evils of the greatest magnitude ; and evils, too, for which we know no other remedy.

If we are rightly informed, the association has been got up to counteract the political influence of Romanism, by resisting the political elevation of foreigners. It does not propose to exclude from office or authority, legislative or executive, Romanists as such, but only foreigners. Yet, as the great body of Romanists in this country are emigrants from Europe, it cannot be denied that the exclusion of foreigners will necessarily affect the Roman Catholic Church more

than other churches; and this, so far from being a political evil, may be shown to be necessary to the conservation and perpetuation of civil and religious liberty. And hence, it may be asserted, with great propriety, that an organization such as the "Know Nothings" constitute, is essential to the welfare of our country, as the only adequate means of counteracting Romanism—the most secret and the most formidable association that human ingenuity ever devised, and which, from its very nature, is, and cannot cease to be, hostile to the principles of civil and religious liberty.

That the Roman Catholic Church is a secret society, directed by its hierarchy—absolutely controlled by its priesthood to a degree which has never been exercised by the leaders of any political party in this or any other country—is evident by its religious creed, and its practice everywhere. The confessional is a secret tribunal, before which every member of the Church is required to make known, not only every immoral action, but every thought and purpose of the heart, upon pain of incurring the anathema of the Church, which is equivalent to a sentence of eternal damnation. The secrecy of this tribunal is not only admitted by the Church, but gloried in. Even the priest dare not reveal what is extracted from the penitent under the seal of confession, unless he be authorized to divulge it by Church authority.

This will not be denied, we presume; but this is not all. The priest is thus put in possession of secrets which enable him to hold his penitent under secret obligation which he dares not violate. The priest, as we have said, is bound to secrecy,

but may be released by his superiors from the obligation, and always will be, as he always has been so released, when the good of the Church requires it. The penitent must have been a very correct man in all his relations, if his confession does not place him absolutely in the power of his priest, even in regard to his worldly interests; but in regard to his spiritual interests, his absolute dependence on his confessor is unquestionable. He has been taught to believe that priestly absolution is essential to his salvation, and what is still worse, that the validity and efficacy of this absolution depend upon the secret intention of the priest who administers, or pronounces it: so that if it be pronounced with all formality, and according to the established *formula* of the church, it is wholly unavailing, unless the priest has a "*right intention*" in the exercise of his function.

The penitent is, therefore, wholly in the power of the priest; for, although his confessor may go through all the outward form of receiving his confession and giving absolution, yet he must be lost—for ever lost—if his priest has not been so conciliated as to exercise a right intention in his own mind. This is the doctrine of the Church, as laid down by the so called holy, infallible Council of Trent, the last œcumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church.

Now, we put it to any man of reason and common sense: if you believe all this; if you believe the priest had all your eternal interests in his power—could send you to heaven or hell, even while he administered the rites of the Church outwardly, by exercising or withholding a secret "*right inten-*

tion" in the administration of the sacraments, or the power of absolution—if you believe in these doctrines of the Church of Rome, would you incur the displeasure of the priest for any earthly consideration? But if not, is not every Roman Catholic under the absolute control of a secret society, by considerations not only of a temporal, but of an eternal weight?

But it may be thought that no sensible man can believe all this! Yet if a man does not believe it he is not a Roman Catholic at all; and why any but such can go to confession, in a country where no legal authority or political advantages are made to depend upon going to confession, we cannot divine. In Roman Catholic countries, where all social and political advantages are made to depend upon being in the Church, and the being in the Church is made to depend upon going to confession, at least once a year, we can easily conceive how an Atheist may be induced to conform to the requirement, as he believes in no future judgment or accountability. But why even an Atheist should profess to be a Catholic, and conform to the requirements of the confessional in this country, we cannot imagine, unless it be from a desire to secure Catholic votes and influence, to aid his political aspirations.

Having, then, among us a very large secret society, governed by a priesthood, who are believed by the members of the association to exercise by divine right the power to fix and determine their eternal destiny, and this priesthood itself being the subjects of a foreign pontiff, prince, and potentate, by what means can such influence be controlled but by a com-

bination of its opponents? and how can such combination be effected but by association and organization? Will it be answered that Romanism, though a secret organization, is not a political one, and therefore does not require to be opposed by a political combination, such as that of the "Know Nothings?" To show this, it will be necessary to prove that the secret organization of Romanism cannot be brought to bear upon politics and political institutions; a position which contradicts all history and experience;—all history, for the Pope himself has been an active agent in the political quarrels, intrigues, and wars of Europe; and in every country where Romanism is dominant, it sustains despotism in the State by the very means it employs to perpetuate it in the Church. So potent is this ecclesiastical influence, that every struggle of the people for civil liberty has been prostrated by it, except where the Reformation overthrew Romanism, and gave the people the Bible. Napoleon the First succumbed to Popery, and established it as the religion of France, with princely revenues and endowments. Louis Philippe assumed the protectorate of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and compelled the helpless Tahitians to admit the Jesuits and French brandy. And now the Emperor, elected by the people of France, keeps a body of French troops in Rome to protect his "holiness" from the indignation of an oppressed, enslaved, and starving population.

Where, we ask, has Romanism the ascendancy in any country in which it has not crushed out every feature and semblance of civil and religious liberty? But if this cannot

be shown, is it not idle to contend that this systematic hostility to human rights is not inherent in the system, and will, if permitted, do the very same thing in our free and happy country? Indeed, the purpose has been openly avowed by the papers of the Roman Catholic Church, which have kindly forewarned us that "whenever the Roman Catholics obtain a sufficient numerical majority of the population of the United States—as they are destined to do—there will be an end to civil and religious liberty;" that is, we shall be governed by the incumbent of St. Peter's chair, whoever he may chance to be. The oath of every Roman Catholic bishop and archbishop binds him to absolute and unquestioned obedience, not only to the present Pope, but to his successors, and to "oppose and persecute" all who do not submit to his authority.

Was it not time to take the alarm, and to combine to resist the secret association which already threatened us with the loss of all that freemen, and free Christians, hold dear on earth? Yet the fact is, that even this did not produce any associate resistance or counteraction. We waited for some overt act of the Romish hierarchy to rouse us to opposition; and, encouraged by the ever swelling tide of Romanist immigrants from abroad, the priesthood ventured to enter upon an open field of combat, and everywhere assailed our public school system of education. The first onset was, we think, in the city of New York, by Bishop Hughes himself, who applied to the city council for one-fifth of the annual amount of the school tax, for the education of Catholic children,

alleging that the Bible, and other books offensive to the Catholic conscience, were read in the public schools. The council appointed a committee to visit the schools, and ascertain what books were read in the schools, and whether there was really anything in them which could reasonably be objected to by any religious denomination. In the meantime, the public school society had done much to appease the Romanists. They had blotted and defaced many of the books in use. Some whole pages were obliterated by being stamped with printers' ink, on other pages only paragraphs were expunged, and other pages were pasted together, thereby obliterating two pages at once.

The committee from the council entering upon their mission, most mischievously took it into their heads to visit the Roman Catholic free schools, which were of course under their exclusive management, and found there these same books without any obliterations whatever, whether by ink or paste, showing that the objection to them was a mere pretence, after all the professions made of conscientious scruples. But the committee found no Bibles there. The Bible had long since been placed in the *index expurgatorius*, and was, therefore, a forbidden book to all Romanists, unless by special permission of the bishop. We have now a large collection of the expurgated books, and find that most of the passages obliterated are historical and indisputable. So that, in fact, the demand upon the public school society was to falsify history for the accommodation of the Romanists. We are sorry the society complied; but it was done to appease, what they

supposed to be, a conscientious uneasiness on the part of a denomination whose children, most of all, required the benefit of common free school instruction.

Nothing was gained, however, by the sacrifice; and as the bishop could not prevail on the council to grant him the money, he carried his grievances to the State legislature. But neither could the general assembly be persuaded to let the bishop put his hand into the strong box; yet they did what was equivalent, going far towards destroying the best public schools in the world. A law was enacted by which the trustees were made elective, and the disinterested and able supervision of the public school society was superseded in some of the wards by men of very little education—some could not even read, and kept grog-shops at that. If any one should inquire why the governor should recommend, and the legislature enact such a measure, we reply, the Papists had votes at the command of the bishop, and the politicians were in the market.

After this the opposition to the Bible in the public schools was carried into every part of the United States; and even where it succeeded it did not appease the Romanists. The sworn enemies of knowledge among the people, nothing short of the destruction of the whole system of the common school education could satisfy the Romish hierarchy. It was now that the "Know-Nothings" effected an organization, and aroused the people everywhere to a sense of their danger; and showed that this danger was imminent, notwithstanding the Romanists were in a minority; for the majority were

divided into two great parties, each catering for the Catholic vote, which was ready everywhere, under the direction of the priesthood, to be cast in favor of whatever party would most favor the pretensions and claims of "Holy Mother Church."

We conclude, therefore, that if secret party associations are an evil, yet the organization of the "Know Nothings" is a necessary one—necessary to the salvation of the country from the despotic rule of the Romish hierarchy—to the preservation of our civil and religious freedom, and hence should be not only tolerated, but encouraged.

That the public safety cannot be entirely trusted to either of the great political parties, is evident from reason and experience. Nor would any good arise from the destruction of these parties, and the substitution of new ones; for while the contest is only between political parties, held together by the hope of public office or emolument, they will bid high for the influence of the Catholic priesthood. Any counteraction of this sinister influence must necessarily come from those who, rising above party ties and compacts, make the counteraction of the secret society which threatens the public liberty an exclusive, all-governing principle, in the exercise of the right of suffrage.

The influence of the Romanists on our political men, even Protestants, is seen in the readiness some of them show to comply with the demand of the priesthood to exclude the Bible from our common schools. They affect to consider it as a question of conscience, and if their reasoning is sound, they ought to exclude all religious teachings whatever; for

no religious doctrine, or moral precept, can be taught which will meet no objections. We hold that the State has a right to make the Bible a school book, without leave of either Catholics or Protestants. The design of public schools is not to make theologians, or churchmen of any kind, but to make good citizens. This object cannot be obtained without inculcating the doctrine of future retribution ; and no book but the Bible does this by divine authority. No system of religion or ethics, not founded upon the Bible, can affect to teach of authority, or to enforce either doctrines or precepts with suitable sanctions. The Bible, then, is the only school-book which can be relied upon by the State to carry out the great purpose of common school education ; and hence the State has a right to require the reading of it in the schools it maintains, without consulting the wishes of any sect or denomination.